

HR Weekly Podcast

12/13/07

Today is December 13, 2007, and welcome to the HR Weekly Podcast from the State Office of Human Resources. This week's topic concerns seasonal workplace celebrations and how they pertain to human resources.

According to a survey by Battalia Wilson International, almost 90% of companies and offices around the United States have some kind of end-of-the-year or seasonal celebration. These activities can range from an off-site office party to a community service event to help raise money for a charitable cause. The majority of employees see end-of-the-year activities as an opportunity to further build friendships and as a morale booster, which contributes to the overall business purpose.

Human resources professionals should make sure that end-of-the-year activities are not offensive to employees. Although Christmas is a United States national holiday, it is important to remember that not everyone in America celebrates Christmas. For that reason, it may be wise to emphasize these parties as an "end-of-the-year" party rather than a "Christmas Party." Also, be mindful of not forcing religious activities on employees, such as a mandatory gift giving or discriminating in giving leave for religious observance. Some good management practices may include incorporating decorations of other seasonal observances and considering menu options to incorporate other religions. Any workplace activity should be accommodating to all. For example, employees of a certain faith may not wish to eat certain foods or employees with disabilities may require special accommodations for transportation if the activity takes place off-site.

While an agency having a holiday or end-of-the-year party should be inclusive of all employees, attendance should not be required. A little less than half of employers have holiday luncheons during work hours, while more than half have evening affairs, with the majority of those being off-site. It should be clear to employees that the employer's policies do still apply at agency-sponsored events and employees can still be disciplined for misconduct.

It is important for HR, as well as everyone involved, to know that an employer could be held liable for employees' actions at a holiday party and any injuries incurred. Careful prior planning and thought should be put into any kind of holiday activity to try and prevent unpleasant situations, accommodate everyone, and help everyone have a good time.

If you have any questions or concerns about this issue, please call your HR consultant at 737-0900.

Thank you.